

Interbel Telephone Cooperative's Easement and Fiber Optic Cable Upgrade through Woods Ranch WMA

Draft Environmental Assessment

May 2010

Prepared by:

Tim Thier, FWP Area Biologist



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Interbel Telephone Cooperative's Easement and Fiber Optic Cable Upgrade through Woods Ranch WMA

Public Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to establish a formal agreement with Interbel Telephone Cooperative (Eureka, MT) for a utility easement for existing and future communication cables across the Woods Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The easement would allow the Cooperative the ability to replace an existing underground copper wire system with a new underground fiber optic cable. The new cable would follow existing and abandoned roadways within the WMA along its entire length.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3. Name, address, and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):

Interbel Telephone Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 648
300 Dewey Avenue
Eureka, MT 59917
(406) 889-3311

4. Anticipated schedule:

Estimated construction commencement date: May 2010
Estimated completion date: August 2010
Current status of project design (% complete): 100%

5. Location affected by proposed action:

The proposed action would occur approximately 7 miles north of Eureka, Montana, in Lincoln County and involve portions of Section 12 (T37N, R27W) and Sections 7, 18, and 8 (T37N, R26W).

6. Project size - estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>2.2</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0.2</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>2.5</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

7. Listing of any other local, state, or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

(a) Permits (permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start):

None

(b) Funding:

None

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:

None

8. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project, including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Interbel Telephone Cooperative is seeking to: 1) formally obtain a utility easement through the Woods Ranch WMA and 2) install an underground fiber optic cable that will traverse the Woods Ranch WMA and then follow its southern and eastern boundaries.

A county road historically traversed the Woods Ranch WMA prior to its acquisition by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in 1978. Beginning in about 1964, Interbel Telephone Cooperative used the county road right of way for overhead communication lines for area residences. These were later replaced by underground copper wire systems that also followed the right of way of the old county road. Records on file at the Clerk and Recorder's Office in Libby indicate the road traversing the WMA was formally abandoned on January 4, 1968.

Recent efforts to identify or locate an existing utility easement between Interbel Telephone Cooperative and past landowners or FWP have been unsuccessful. Given what appears to be the lack of an existing easement, Interbel Telephone Cooperative is hoping to formally correct this matter by purchasing a utility easement across the Woods Ranch WMA that would follow abandoned and existing roadways and existing underground cables. This easement would be 13,051 feet long, 15 feet wide, and encompass 4.494 acres. The value of this easement has been estimated at \$17,976.

Once an easement has been formally obtained, Interbel Telephone Cooperative would like to install a new fiber optic cable the length of the entire easement. The cable will be buried to a depth of 36" using a vibrating plow mounted on a caterpillar-type tractor. The underground disturbance will be approximately 4" wide, while an area approximately 4-5' wide will be disturbed at the surface along the entire length of the proposed underground cable. Assuming a 5' wide disturbance area over the entire length of 13,051 feet, a maximum of 1.5 acres will be disturbed. Surface areas disturbed by activities will be seeded with a perennial grass mixture. Once the fiber optic cable is installed, the

existing underground copper cables will be abandoned in place. Benefits of this proposed action include improved communications (phone and internet) with residents living east and south of the WMA.

9. Description of alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Failure to approve a formal utility easement with Interbel Telephone Cooperative would force them to seek alternative routes, probably from the Indian Creek area and across large tracts of private land. This would be prohibitively expensive and probably more damaging to the environment. The current copper wires have limited band width and are becoming “filled” and antiquated. Decreases in service quality to area residences would be inevitable.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Approval of the utility easement and installation of the fiber optic cable through Woods Ranch WMA paralleling an existing underground cable is the most practical, economical, and beneficial (to area residences) option available. By following existing and abandoned roadways, it is also the option that is least likely to be detrimental to the environment.

PART II. PREDICTED ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1b.
c. Destruction, covering, or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition, or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:						

1b. The proposed action will result in minimal surface disturbance long its entire length. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a perennial grass mixture. The proposed route for the fiber optic cable will follow existing roadways and underground cables.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:						

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:						

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				4d.
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				4e.
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

4d & e. The proposed action will result in minimal surface disturbance along its entire length. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a perennial grass mixture. The proposed route for the fiber optic cable will follow existing roadways and underground cables. Vehicles used in the cable installation will be sprayed to prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?			X			5g.
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:						

5f. Although bald eagles, grizzly bears, and wolves frequent the area, this proposed action will have no effect on any of them.

5g. The Woods Ranch WMA is an important wintering area for elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep. Activities during the winter period could cause considerable disturbance to individual animals, but would not likely affect populations. By conducting activities between May and August, the negative effects on wildlife are minimized.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				6d.
e. Other:						

6d. Installation of the fiber optic cable will result in an improvement in communications, not a detriment.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:						

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a.)		X				
e. Other:						

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?	X					9a.
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

9a. Theoretically, given the increase in services with this fiber optic system, the area to the south and east of the Woods Ranch WMA may become a more desirable place to live, potentially resulting in an increase in residences.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources						
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						
g. Other:						

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:		X				11e.

11e. The Woods Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is an area of scenic enjoyment while providing important habitat for wildlife. It also provides many hours of hunting opportunity during the fall months. The proposed activities will occur during a time period that will not conflict with hunters, nor will scenic opportunities be affected.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12a.)		X				
e. Other:						

12a. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) asked that a formal cultural inventory be completed of the entire project area (including the road). This work was conducted by Calvi Cultural Resource Surveys on April 24, 2010. Nothing of significance was found. A copy of the final report has been sent to SHPO for their records and is available upon request.

C: SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard, or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

1. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

The surface area disturbed by installing the underground cable will be reseeded with a perennial grass mixture. Vehicles used in the installation of the fiber optic cable will be sprayed to control the spread of noxious weeds. Work will be conducted between the months of May and September to minimize effects on wildlife and reduce the potential of conflict with hunters. Gates will be closed and locked while work is conducted on the WMA to minimize unauthorized vehicle access by the public.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Without a formal easement across the Woods Ranch WMA and the installation of the proposed fiber optic cable, services to area residents will gradually diminish as use of the existing copper cable becomes "filled" and antiquated. This proposal is the least damaging environmentally and also the most economical.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this draft EA, the proposed action, and the alternatives:

- Two legal ads in each of these papers: *Tobacco Valley News* and *Daily Inter Lake*.
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (15) fifteen days, from May 4, 2010. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., May 19, 2010, and can be mailed to Tim Thier, FWP Area Wildlife Biologist, P.O. Box 507, Trego, MT 59934, (406) 882-4697 or e-mail to tthier@mt.gov.

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No.

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

This action follows existing roadways that have already been disturbed. The action itself is minor and not a threat to humans or the environment. The activity is taking place during a time when the effects on wildlife are minimal.

2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:

Tim Thier, FWP Area Wildlife Biologist
P.O. Box 507
Trego, MT 59934
(406) 882-4697

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Wildlife Division
Design & Construction Bureau
Legal Bureau

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service

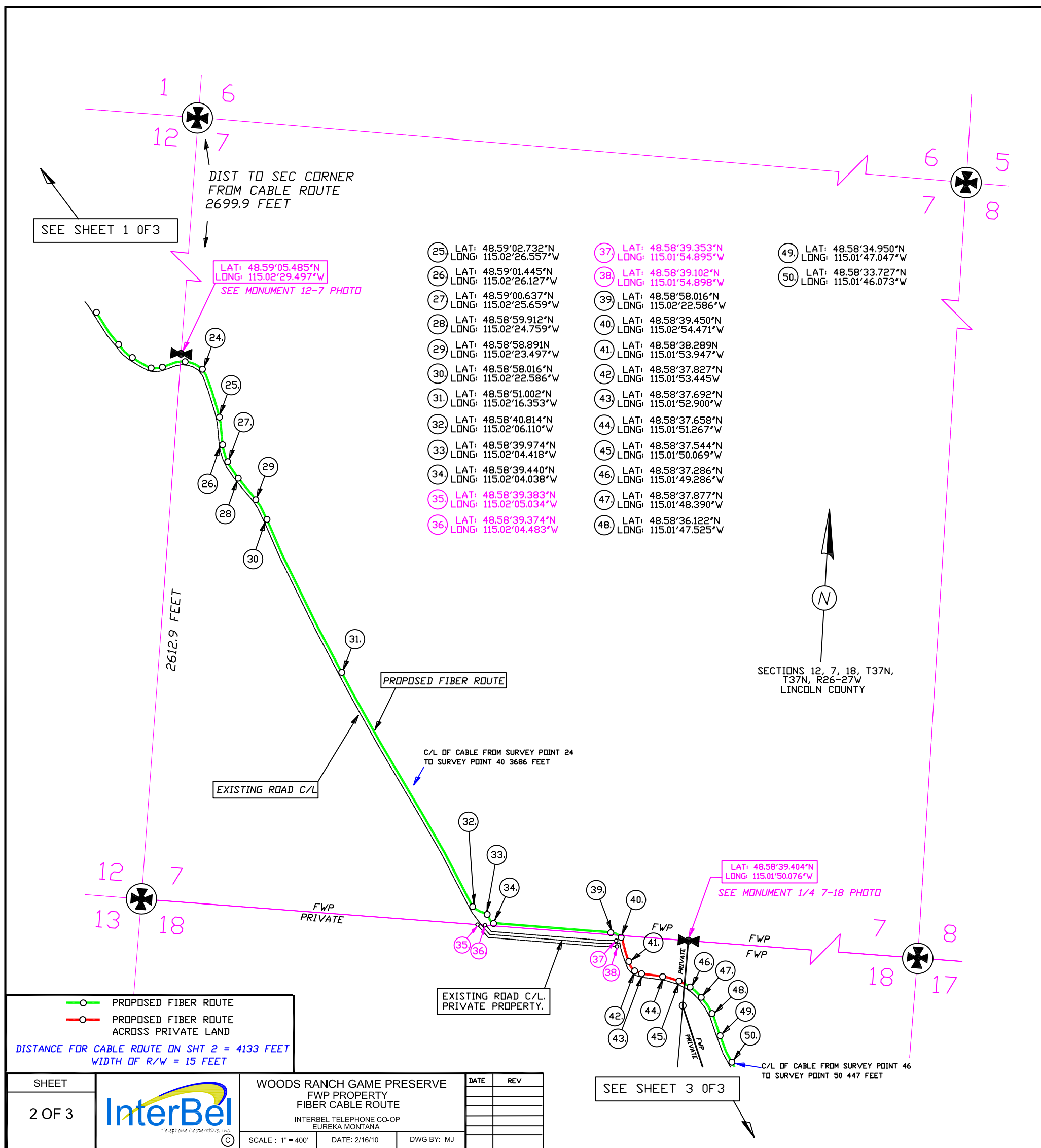
APPENDICES

- A. General Map of Project Area
- B. Detailed Map #1 of Project Area
- C. Detailed Map #2 of Project Area
- D. Detailed Map #3 of Project Area
- E. Photo of PON Site and Proposed Cable Route
- F. Letter from Montana State Historic Preservation Office

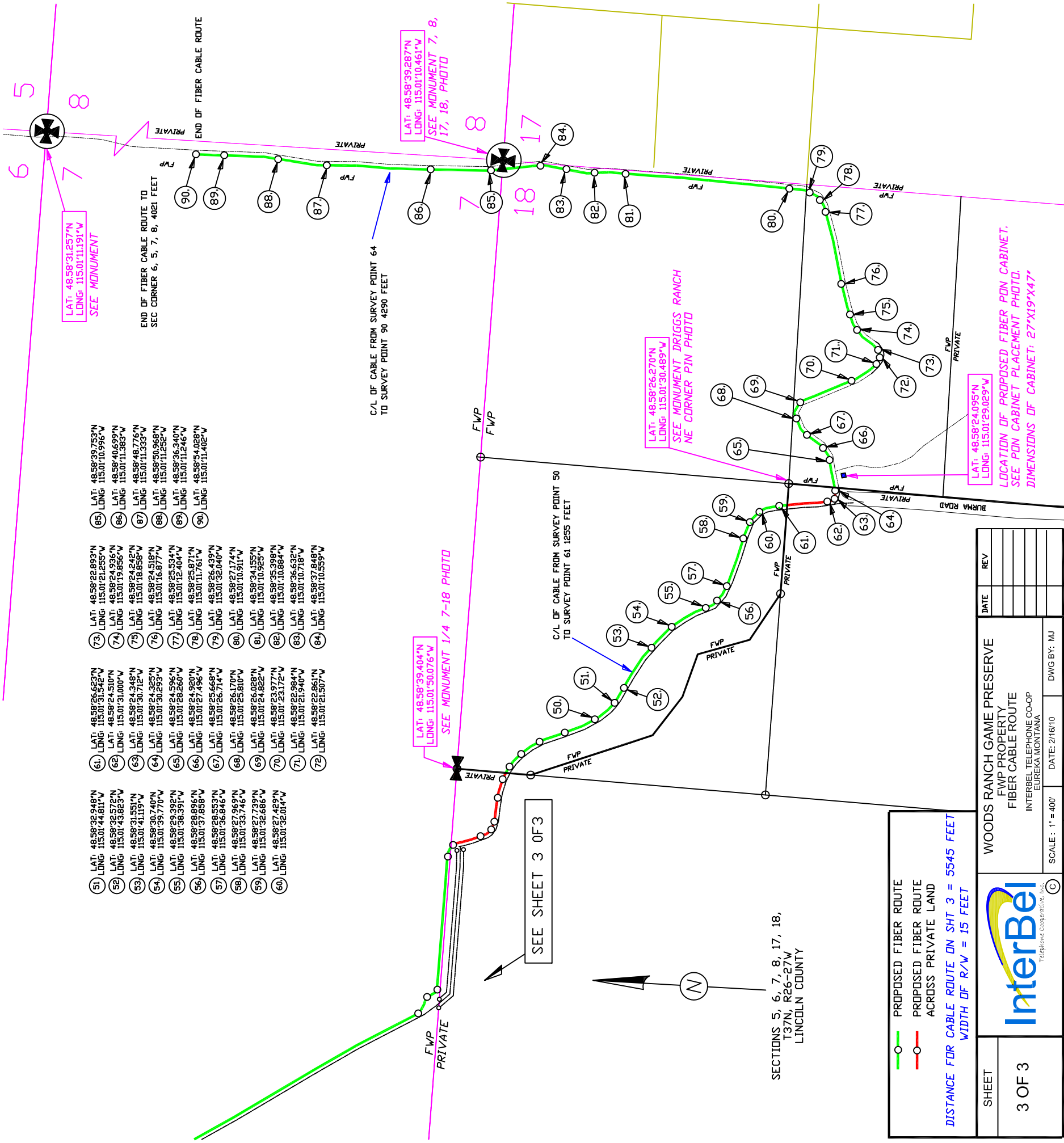
Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C




Appendix D



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (51) LAT: 48.58°32.948'N
LONG: 115.01°44.811'W | (61) LAT: 48.58°26.623'N
LONG: 115.01°31.542'W | (71) LAT: 48.58°22.893'N
LONG: 115.01°21.255'W | (81) LAT: 48.58°39.753'N
LONG: 115.01°10.996'W |
| (52) LAT: 48.58°32.572'N
LONG: 115.01°43.823'W | (62) LAT: 48.58°24.510'N
LONG: 115.01°31.000'W | (72) LAT: 48.58°22.893'N
LONG: 115.01°21.255'W | (82) LAT: 48.58°40.699'N
LONG: 115.01°11.383'W |
| (53) LAT: 48.58°31.551'N
LONG: 115.01°41.119'W | (63) LAT: 48.58°24.348'N
LONG: 115.01°30.712'W | (73) LAT: 48.58°24.348'N
LONG: 115.01°30.712'W | (83) LAT: 48.58°48.776'N
LONG: 115.01°11.333'W |
| (54) LAT: 48.58°30.740'N
LONG: 115.01°39.770'W | (64) LAT: 48.58°24.325'N
LONG: 115.01°30.293'W | (74) LAT: 48.58°24.318'N
LONG: 115.01°30.293'W | (84) LAT: 48.58°50.969'N
LONG: 115.01°11.232'W |
| (55) LAT: 48.58°29.392'N
LONG: 115.01°38.391'W | (65) LAT: 48.58°24.596'N
LONG: 115.01°28.260'W | (75) LAT: 48.58°25.534'N
LONG: 115.01°12.404'W | (85) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |
| (56) LAT: 48.58°29.896'N
LONG: 115.01°37.886'W | (66) LAT: 48.58°24.980'N
LONG: 115.01°27.496'W | (76) LAT: 48.58°25.871'N
LONG: 115.01°11.761'W | (86) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |
| (57) LAT: 48.58°28.553'N
LONG: 115.01°36.846'W | (67) LAT: 48.58°25.668'N
LONG: 115.01°26.714'W | (77) LAT: 48.58°26.439'N
LONG: 115.01°12.040'W | (87) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |
| (58) LAT: 48.58°27.969'N
LONG: 115.01°33.746'W | (68) LAT: 48.58°26.170'N
LONG: 115.01°25.810'W | (78) LAT: 48.58°27.171'N
LONG: 115.01°10.911'W | (88) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |
| (59) LAT: 48.58°27.739'N
LONG: 115.01°32.686'W | (69) LAT: 48.58°26.028'N
LONG: 115.01°24.822'W | (79) LAT: 48.58°27.969'N
LONG: 115.01°33.746'W | (89) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |
| (60) LAT: 48.58°27.429'N
LONG: 115.01°32.014'W | (70) LAT: 48.58°23.977'N
LONG: 115.01°23.172'W | (80) LAT: 48.58°27.969'N
LONG: 115.01°33.746'W | (90) LAT: 48.58°54.028'N
LONG: 115.01°11.402'W |

PROPOSED FIBER ROUTE
PROPOSED FIBER ROUTE
ACROSS PRIVATE LAND

DISTANCE FOR CABLE ROUTE ON SHT 3 = 5545 FEET
WIDTH OF R/W = 15 FEET

SHEET				WOODS RANCH GAME PRESERVE		DATE	REV
3 OF 3				FWP PROPERTY FIBER CABLE ROUTE INTERBEL TELEPHONE CO-OP EUREKA, MONTANA			
				SCALE: 1" = 400'	DATE: 2/16/10	DWG BY: MJ	

Appendix E

PON CABINET PLACEMENT PHOTO
SEE SHEET 2 OF 3

POWER POLE

FIBER PON CABINET



PROPOSED UNDERGROUND FIBER ROUTE

NORTH



Appendix F

From: Murdo, Damon
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2010 10:47 AM
To: Ivy, Nancy
Subject: RE: File Search Request Form
Attachments: CRABS.pdf; CRIS.pdf



March 31, 2010

Nancy Ivy
FWP
490 N Meridian Road
Kalispell MT 59901

RE: INTERBEL TELEPHONE COOP. EASEMENT & FIBER OPTIC CABLE UPGRADE, WOODS RANCH WMA. SHPO Project #: 2010033104

Dear Nancy:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited projects. According to our records there have a few previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. In addition to the sites there have been a few previously conducted cultural resource inventories done in the areas. I've attached a list of these sites and reports. If you would like any further information regarding these sites or reports you may contact me at the number listed below.

Based on the lack of previous inventory and the ground disturbance required by this undertaking we feel that this project has the potential to impact cultural properties. We, therefore, recommend that a cultural resource inventory be conducted in order to determine whether or not sites exist and if they will be impacted.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

File: FWP/WILDLIFE/2010